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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

CARVING.

AS to carving, the industrial activity of the present day, and the facilities provided in the rapid production in various compositions of artistic forms, have not proved favorable to its development. What marvels of manipulation are the carvings of the Dutch, Flemish, French, Italian and English masters of this art, the latter few and with no worthy successors, as witness the unapproached productions of Grinling Gibbons. Peerless Italian cabinets of the 15th and 16th centuries, with ornamentation in carving skilfully subdued, so as to emphasize instead of encumbering the general form, continue to excite admiration. The interior scenes portrayed by Albert Dürer are famous for their realistic effect.

As permanent adornments, and as entering into structural forms such as friezes of walls and panels, figure supports, and entablatures of massive articles of furniture, good carving is an invaluable adjunct. It carries with it not alone the sense of labor, but the individuality of the worker, and affords characteristic means of expression not found in any other productions of the hand. The lights passing into shadow differ in effect from the *chiaro oscuro* of white marble statuary in that they have the appearance of pertaining to the wood itself, as dyes delicately gradated, whilst on pure marble they appear simply as atmospheric shades.

The most striking carvings of medieval times were not the most elaborate or most highly finished, but their power lay in expression. As art taste progresses, the demand will enlarge for the higher class of carving. The experience of France, Germany and England shows how an art that has reached its zenith may degenerate. The cumbrously carved English furniture in the first half of the present century had the backs of mahogany and walnut sideboards loaded with heterogeneous and confused collections of pomegranate and other fruits, with leaves



DESIGN FOR DECORATIVE PANEL, BY ALFRED THOMPSON.



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looking marvellously like those of cabbages, whilst carved game, often life-size, appeared on the panels below hung by carved strings to carved wooden nails.

Such absurdities gave evidence that on overloading the structural form the true purpose of carving had been lost sight of, as well as the truth that its value for enrichment does not consist in the amount of detailed work expended on it, an evidenced artistic motif being more important than the exact delineation of form.

Latterly in our own cabinet work, under the influence of improved taste, all over designs or large umbrageous centre pieces have been abandoned and in their place we have either small elegantly executed centre designs, with corner designs, or only the latter. In these, where skill is not wanting, the parts are duly subordinated to one principal object. If the backs of sideboards are finished off at top with carving, this is of a character to heighten the structural form; we have seen excellent carving of portraits and full figures—the tableaux, more or less of a social character, worked out on the vertical surface of these shelf-backs.

PANELS.

PANELS, such as the grotesque suggestions upon this page, are popular in many forms of decorative work; designs of like tendency, looking toward exaggeration and oddity, are frequent in German sketches. The panels here shown were designed and drawn by Captain Alfred Thompson, whose well known work in designing the scenery for *Sardanapalus*, *Comedy of Errors* and *Romeo and Juliet*, gave more ideas to artists and designers than usually can be found in even the stage settings of modern days.